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The Gift of

L. J. Peters, Jr.



first 1000

HARRY TWYFORD PETERS



HARRY T. PETERS, MASTER OF HOUNDS, MEADOW BROOK

Watercolor by Gordon Ross, 1911

PRESENTATION OF THE NEW-YORK
HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S GOLD MEDAL
FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN HISTORY TO

Harry Twyford Peters

DECEMBER 8, 1947



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HARRY TWYFORD PETERS

(August 1, 1881—June 1, 1948)

*It is with great sorrow that we record the death
of Mr. Harry Twyford Peters on the afternoon
of June the first, nineteen hundred and forty-eight.*

The following account of the presentation of the Society's Gold Medal to Mr. Peters and of the recipient's achievements in the history of the graphic arts was written by Mary Bartlett Cowdrey and published in the *Society's Quarterly* for April 1948. It is reprinted for private distribution in an edition of 250 copies.

PRESENTATION OF THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S
GOLD MEDAL FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN HISTORY TO

HARRY TWYFORD PETERS



THE New-York Historical Society's gold medal "For Achievement in History" was awarded on the evening of December 8, 1947, to Mr. Harry T. Peters in recognition of his contributions to the field of graphic arts. The medal, which has been bestowed on only four previous occasions since it was designed in 1925, was presented by Dr. Fenwick Beckman, President of the Society, during a quiet, informal ceremony at Mr. Peters' home. Presented with the medal was the following citation:

The Board of Trustees of The New-York Historical Society, in recognition of the outstanding contributions of HARRY TWYFORD PETERS to the history of the graphic arts in America and to the social history of our people, * Through the assembling of his unique collections of the lithographs of Currier and Ives and the works of other early American lithographers and woodcut artists, * Through the publication of his scholarly and authoritative works *Currier and Ives, Printmakers to the American People*, *America on Stone*, and *Californians on Stone* and his other essays and lectures in this field, * Through his leadership and generous encouragement of other scholars and his years of service as officer, counselor and member of national societies devoted to American history, bibliography and the graphic arts, * Has awarded him the Society's Gold Medal for Achievement in History this eighth day of December, nineteen hundred and forty-seven.

[Signed] R. W. G. VAIL
Secretary to the Board

FENWICK BECKMAN
President

Among his accomplishments and achievements in many fields of activity, Harry T. Peters is today the outstanding collector of American prints. He has amassed the largest collection of 19th-century American lithographs covering all phases of life during the last three quarters of the past century. First he sought out

prints published by Currier & Ives, then his interest extended to lithographs of all American publishers. His three books: *Currier & Ives, Printmakers to the American People*, in two volumes (1929, 1931), *America on Stone* (1931), and *California on Stone* (1935), reflect only a part of the wide scope of his own collection, but there is sufficient otherwise-unobtainable information within these three large works to place Mr. Peters among the more important writers on the history of American art and American social history.

Born on August 1, 1881, the son of Samuel T. and Adaline Elder Peters, Harry T. Peters grew up and has spent all his life in this city. He graduated at Columbia College in 1903. Although his father was a collector and a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the elder Peters' interest in the field of Chinese ceramics hardly touched the son. His inspiration as a connoisseur of prints came rather from his uncle, Mr. Henry O. Havemeyer, who with his wife built up a notable collection of late-19th-century French paintings. Mr. Havemeyer, knowing Harry Peters' fondness for horses and hunting, advised his nephew to concentrate on American prints, for no one was collecting them at the turn of the century. Horace Greeley could not have given better advice to a young man.

Starting in with the equestrian prints which he found in many a Long Island barn, Mr. Peters soon had pictures of all the well-known horses—the one, for instance, of *Lady Suffolk* obtained from her old stall. After he had acquired all the good prints of the turf, the collecting urge was so well developed that Mr. Peters had to go on to other subjects and found an almost endless variety among the lithographs published by Currier & Ives. The great interest here was the various aspects of life: sport, town views, historic scenes, portraits, comics, literary illustrations, and social scenes, but, as Mr. Peters has so often pointed out, none of this was art. In fact, he was far less concerned with the fine arts than were his contemporaries and was practically alone in realizing the historical and sociological value of print-collecting in the



MEDAL AWARDED TO HARRY TWYFORD PETERS, 1943

early days of the century. While others decried the lack of artistry in Currier & Ives prints, Mr. Peters went on his way collecting without being concerned by the problem of aesthetic values. (That Mr. Peters is not unaware of, or insensitive to, these problems, however, is evidenced by his article: "George Henry Durrie, 1820-1863," in *Panorama*, December, 1945.) The collection grew rapidly in the period up to about 1920. Mr. Peters tells of buying prints by the bundle and of finding one particularly large bundle in a harness shop at Newburgh, New York, while he was there on a business trip selling coal. In New York he made frequent visits to the secondhand bookshops, where prints were usually classified by subject matter and sold in packages. Almost every package would contain good items for the collection. In those days it was wholesale collecting, for the prints themselves had practically no individual value.

Of the other American print collections being formed in the early years of this century, the more notable ones were the Percy Pyne collection of New York views, dispersed at public auction in 1917, the L. N. Phelps Stokes collection of American town views, given to the New York Public Library in 1930, and the F. W. C. Arnold collection of New York views, now on loan at the Museum of the City of New York. None of these collectors, however, paid particular attention to Currier & Ives, nor did

they feature the medium of lithography. The first important private collection of Currier & Ives was that of William Whiting Nolen, known as "Widow" Nolen, the Harvard tutor. This was sold, after his death, at the Anderson Galleries in New York on March 4, 1924. At the sale the collecting audience was impressed with the prices brought by certain of the Currier & Ives and other American prints. Auction values were thus established for the first time on such prints and the prices were high enough to start new collectors on the great race to buy the American scene. Before the Nolen sale five dollars or so was practically a top price for the best of the Carriers.

In the late 1920's Mr. Peters realized that the time had come to write a book telling the story of the famous publishing house of Currier & Ives and to provide a checklist of the known prints. This he did in 1929 when he brought out the first volume of his important work: *Currier & Ives, Printmakers to the American Public*; the second volume followed in 1931. The checklist, including about 4,700 prints, is now the standard reference and "HTP" numbers are accepted everywhere for identification. It is not only the checklist which makes these volumes so important; the text itself, telling the story of the firm and giving biographical accounts of the principal personalities, makes a first-rate contribution to the history of the 19th century. Then in 1931 Mr. Peters' *America on Stone* was published. This is an invaluable reference work, being a record of all publishers of American lithographs (known to him at the time) other than Currier & Ives. In 1935 he brought out *California on Stone*, an iconography of the time of the Gold Rush and the rapid growth of the State. Not only do his books cover his own collection, but they are an unequalled review of the history of the American lithograph.

Mr. Peters' *Currier & Ives* had originally been published in a limited edition but, as years went by, the public interest grew tremendously. In 1942 the author re-wrote and condensed his earlier study and Doubleday, Doran brought it out at a popular

price. The Book-of-the-Month Club saw its possibilities and ordered thousands of copies. Within two years, more than 400,000 copies had been printed. Mr. Peters himself was surprised at this success, for no other book in the field of American art had ever been so widely circulated. Mr. Peters' name had become inextricably associated with Currier & Ives. As a matter of fact, he was the best publicity man the firm ever had.

Nathaniel Currier began issuing lithographs as early as 1834, though his substantial success as "N. Currier" dates from about 1840 to 1866. In the latter year he took his brother-in-law, James M. Ives, into partnership, and from 1866 Currier & Ives produced a steady output of lithographs, falling off in production somewhat in the mid-1880's but continuing until the dissolution of the firm in 1907. At the time of the great popular revival of interest in its work, after thousands of people all over the country had heard of Currier & Ives, there began a wave of discovery. Prints which years before had been relegated to the attic were brought back downstairs. The publishers' name was magic; the owners wanted information on their treasures, and no one but Mr. Peters had so thoroughly studied, written about, and collected the record of the famous firm. Mr. Peters' fan-mail increased tremendously and hardly a day went by but there were letters from far and near seeking information. No doubt Mr. Peters enjoyed taking time from his regular business affairs to answer many of these letters and to offer an expert's advice whenever he thought the inquiry warranted it. He thus became the unquestioned authority. As each year goes by, "new" and unrecorded Currier & Ives prints are found, bringing the known total to about 7,000 items. Mr. Peters has about 5,000 of these in his collection along with approximately 4,000 lithographs by other American publishers. No other collection, private or public, can boast so fine a representation of American lithography.

Few collectors have been as generous as Mr. Peters in lending for public exhibition. The Grolier Club exhibition of Currier & Ives in 1929-30, occasioned by the publication of Mr. Peters'

first volume and supplied from his collection, was followed in 1931 by the Carrier & Ives display at the New York Public Library, where 194 prints from the Peters holdings were shown. An illustrated catalogue prepared by Charles F. McCombs stands as a record of that comprehensive exhibition. When the Piping Rock Club of Locust Valley, Long Island, was opened, Mr. Peters lent many Carrier & Ives sporting subjects, and these prints proved to be so popular that the club eventually formed its own collection for permanent display at the clubhouse. During the 1930's countless public exhibitions gratefully acknowledged the kindness of Mr. Peters in lending his prints. The Museum of the City of New York borrowed extensively from the Peters collection when Miss Grace M. Mayer arranged the comprehensive exhibition of New York City views in 1938. One of the shows that pleased Mr. Peters most was an exhibition based on his collection of circus prints and arranged jointly by the Grolier Club and the Museum of the City of New York in 1938. On surprisingly few occasions, however, has Mr. Peters been called upon to cooperate with an art museum. But in 1945 David Keppel, Curator of Prints at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C., chose a group of forty large folio Carriers for the first exhibition of its kind held at that gallery. And again in 1945 five of the large folio Carrier & Ives lithographs were included in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition: *ROMANTIC PARIS 1830-18* AMERICA.

Although Mr. Peters has always been a private collector, it is evident that the public has thought of him as an educational institution. Not only have museums, historical societies, and libraries found him most willing to help in lending from his unique collection, but countless business firms, advertising agencies, insurance companies, and other private organizations have received his gracious assent to their requests for loans and reproduction rights. In short, Mr. Peters has been a one-man museum and a worthy public servant, which marks him off from many another private collector who has overlooked the pleasure of lending.

Mr. Peters' interests as a print-collector have by no means been confined to Currier & Ives, nor have his services to the museums been limited to lending. His notable collection of 10,000 wood-engravings from American news weeklies, 1821-1900, for instance, came to The New-York Historical Society a year ago in its entirety by outright gift. Already it has been the source of one of the Society's most popular exhibitions: *News Artists to 1911: AMERICA AS PROFILE*, of a lecture which marked the preview and opening of the exhibition on February 4, 1947, and of an article: "Plain Talk in Pictures," by Joseph G. F. Hopkins, in the April 1947 *Quarterly*.

Members of the Society who attended Mr. Peters' lectures in its auditorium in 1941, 1942, and 1943 will recall the pleasure and profit derived from his informative talks on "Lithographers other than Currier & Ives," "The Story of the Fair: Its Beginning, Growth, and Effect on American Life," and "New York as the Wood Engraver Saw It." The person who can entertain an audience and fill a lecture hall time after time is rare indeed. Harry T. Peters can do so because, with all his learning, he is a real showman, combining qualities reminiscent of P. T. Barnum and Buffalo Bill. His enthusiasm for his subject is such that he has sometimes shown as many as 110 slides an hour. Many organizations besides the Historical Society have enjoyed the charm and contagious enthusiasm of his talks on Currier & Ives and other 19th-century American prints, among them: the Museum of the City of New York, the Grolier Club, the Century Club, many New York City churches, and other groups.

Few men have led such active lives as Mr. Peters. Besides his participation in the coal business founded by his father, he has served on the boards of banks and other business organizations. Outside of business, he has been actively interested in the Bibliographical Society of America, served as president of the Grolier Club from 1939 to 1943 and for twenty-five years as Master of Hounds of the Meadow Brook Club, and is now Vice-President of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, mem-

The Board of Trustees of
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to the history of the graphic arts in America and to the
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Through the assembling of his unique collections of the
lithographs of Currier and Ives and the works of other
early American lithographers and woodcut artists,

Through the publication of his scholarly and authoritative
works:

*Currier and Ives,
Printmakers to the American People,
America on Stone,
and California on Stone*

and his other essays and lectures in this field,

Through his leadership and generous encouragement
of other scholars and his years of service as officer,
councilor and member of national societies devoted to
American history, bibliography and the graphic arts,

Has awarded him the Society's Gold Medal for
Achievement in History this eighth day of December,
nineteen hundred and forty-seven.



Robert F. Taft
Secretary of the Board

Richard Anderson
President

ILLUMINATED CITATION PRESENTED TO MR. PETERS
WITH THE SOCIETY'S GOLD MEDAL FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN HISTORY
December 8, 1947

ber of the American Antiquarian Society, and, since 1946, a fellow of The New-York Historical Society, of which he became a Life Member in 1930.

We cannot here begin to give a well-rounded picture of the man. Mr. Peters' greatest interest outside of business has been sport. Riding, hunting, horses, and dogs are the things he loves most and to which he has turned in his collecting and literary as well as his active moods. See, for instance, his 250-page volume *Just Hunting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935) and his Introduction to Robert W. Henderson's *Early American Sport* (New York: The Grolier Club, 1937). But in our account of Mr. Peters the print-collector we are forced to stick to our subject and leave for another writer the enviable task of drawing a complete picture of this most unusual man. We can say, however, that we have seldom known a more sympathetic person, always ready to encourage all types of research and scholarship as they touched on American history and American social life. He has been so willing in his help and backing that countless print curators and historians are in his debt and the public benefits greatly from his generosity and enthusiasm.

In making this fifth award of its gold medal "For Achievement in History," The New-York Historical Society, could not have chosen a worthier recipient. The medal was first awarded, in 1925, to Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes in recognition of his monumental *Iconography of Manhattan Island 1498-1909*; next in 1931 to Dr. Wilberforce Eames for his outstanding contributions to American bibliography and historical scholarship, again in 1933 to Mr. DeWitt McGlellan Lockman, N. A., for his valuable work in painting the portraits of distinguished contemporary Americans for the Society's Art Gallery, and finally, in 1943, to Professor George Clinton Densmore Ogdell in recognition of his multi-volumed *Annals of the New York Stage*. It is altogether fitting that the man who now takes his place with this honored company is the distinguished collector, author, and scholar in the graphic arts—Harry Twyford Peters.

MEDALISTS

OF THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Gold Medal for Achievement in History

I. N. Phelps Stokes	1915
Wilberforce Eames	1931
DeWitt M. Lockman, S.A.	1933
George C. D. Odell	1942
Harry T. Peters	1947

Gold Medal for Distinguished Service

John A. Weekes	1933
Samuel V. Hoffman	1934
George A. Zabriskie	1937

